

# Choosing Assistive Technology for Teaching Reading and Writing

By Ken Elkind

When selecting assistive technology for students who struggle in reading and writing, ask yourself the following questions:

## **Is the product versatile and flexible?**

Educators ought to make sure that the assistive technology includes multiple technologies. The product needs to be able to be used by many students with different kinds of disabilities in various classroom settings. Training teachers and students on one versatile product instead of purchasing and employing several products saves training and implementation time.

**Can the product be used with any curriculum, across grades?** A truly flexible assistive technology product adapts to teacher and student requirements, not the other way around.

**Is the product usable?** A product that is user-friendly allows students to quickly find their own unique ways to use the technology. The more tightly assistive technology is integrated with the curriculum, the more likely students will benefit from its use and be able to work independently.

**Is the product supportable?** Vendors who offer training and implementation assistance ensure that both educators and students will derive maximum benefit from the product.



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**Can the technology access all kinds of print text?** The product ought to offer hard copy (via scanning), electronic, and web text.

**Does the product offer a multi-sensory approach?** Technology that reads out loud while simultaneously highlighting the corresponding words on the computer screen helps keep students focused. Voice options that adjust for reading speed and ability mean the product is adaptable for different student's needs.

**Are study skills tools included?** Features such as onscreen highlighters, footnotes and text notes encourage active, independent learning. Access to a talking dictionary and thesaurus, audible syllable identification, etc. help students decode text accurately.

**Does the product provide instant access to writing support tools?** Access to tools such as auditory feedback while typing/writing, a talking spell checker and word prediction are really helpful to students. ■

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## Tackling Special Education Paperwork via the Net

By Cathryn Harvey

We all know that those responsible for the care of special education students record large amounts of information. These individuals are responsible for hundreds of reports each year for each student, and this huge paper trail is designed to assure the accuracy of Individualized Education Plans. Web-based services can allow administrators to efficiently and easily access necessary data, as well as provide easy access points for those administering education plans and other services, for individual student reporting and broad-based efficiency of the school's student services.

In addition to overall special education reporting, schools are also required to maintain records on student behavior problems in order to ensure a safe school environment. If authorized personnel in the school system have access to a web-based program, they can use the same recording criteria and enter the information just once. This provides a repository of information on a student. With the right web-based

program, administrators can start to observe patterns in students' behaviors. This allows them to work with teachers and parents to help students modify the behaviors before the student falls into difficult times.

Ideally, web-based programs need to enable educators to easily view a student's present level of performance. Educators should be able to use this information to create a plan for meaningful instruction. The idea is to produce valid IEPs that comply with state and federal mandates.

By providing data services via the Internet, student information is instantaneously updated and easy to read. By reporting on student progress quickly and efficiently, less time is spent on managing the whole special education process and more time is spent teaching students. ■

Submitted by Cathryn Harvey of Curriculum Associates, a company with the online S-BIP Reporting System ([www.curriculumassociates.com](http://www.curriculumassociates.com)).

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